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ABSTRACT

As early as 1932, Piaget posited four phases of development in moral judgments: amorality, egocentric morality, morality of constraint, and morality of cooperation. In the morality of cooperation, reciprocity (i.e., social reversibility) develops first on a concrete level and then on the level of abstract reciprocity or generalized exchange. In 1971, Kohlberg addressed the problem of the nature of reciprocity or reversibility in moral judgments and attempted, at least in theory, to describe the developing principle of reciprocity across his six stages. Scrutiny of Kohlberg's (1982) scoring manual, however, provides no evidence of developing reciprocity in the criterion judgments of individuals' responses at each stage. The concept is not totally absent, but neither is it articulated, nor logically extended throughout the system. Kohlberg's theory purports to be a Piagetian-based system, but does it, in fact, demonstrate Piaget's notion of cognitive-moral structure in scoring as well as theory? Analysis of the Heinz dilemma suggests ways Kohlberg's system of stages may be viewed, as a developing compensation for injustices regarding retributive justice. Such compensations tend toward an abstract and perfect reciprocity. In answer to the question "Is Kohlberg really Piagetian?" the answer is, "It is quite possible!" (RH)

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ABSTRACT

PRESENTATION TITLE: IS KOHLBERG REALLY PIAGETIAN?

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Both Kohlberg and Piaget propose to be Structuralists. It is on the basis of a developing structure that stages are delimited and defined for both theorists. Kohlberg's theory purports to be a Piagetian based system, but does it, in fact, demonstrate Piaget's notion of cognitive-moral structure in scoring as well as theory? The answer proposed, at best, is "only partially." First, it is the purpose of this paper to spell out in detail Piaget's notion of structure and, second, to extend the notion to examples from protocols of Kohlberg's moral dilemma, the Heinz dilemma, to show how both presently scoreable and non-scoreable material can be thus analyzed.

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IS KOHLBERG REALLY PIAGETIAN?

The moral development theory of Lawrence Kohlberg has been attacked on many fronts in the past few years. I am not intending here to add to that attack, but I would like to explore what I think is the crux of a theory that purports to extend Piaget. Of course, in the same way as one may speak of hard and soft stages, one may speak of hard and soft extensions of Piaget. But, like Kohlberg, I am interested in the hard aspects of theory, e.g., structure. And so, the question is critical "Does the stage theory of Kohlberg represent the Piagetian concept of structure?"

Piaget began his articulation of the notion of structure in 1941 when he borrowed the concept from the Bourbaki mathematicians. This "structure", Piaget claimed, begins in childhood with the mental construction of the grouping of interiorized operations, characterized by a number of well known properties. This development is completed in adolescence with the full group structure of binary combinations (sixteen propositions). For all Piaget's reliance on mathematicians, however, any long term student of Piaget has learned that the hallmark of Piaget's theory and of his assessment of stage level is the presence of operations that reflect "reversibility" i.e., the combinations of actions into reversible systems, largely through their inversions or compensations.

In 1945, Piaget extended this notion of reversibility to social development and argued that social interaction admits of a reversible structure,

particularly evident by verbal and material exchange. For Piaget, social reversibility, compensation or reciprocity, is the appropriate form of a balanced social structure represented by co-operations. This apparent understanding of reciprocity and use of it in moral judgements develops with age.

Certainly, co-operations, which Piaget sees as the fundamental ideal social end, develops in predictable phases, if not in stages. As early as 1932, Piaget posited four phases of development in moral judgements: amorality, egocentric morality, morality of constraint, and morality of cooperation. Since my concern, here, is with developing structure, let me begin with the fact that social reversibility, i.e., reciprocity, begins in the morality of co-operation phase, as it defines the phase, and is characterized by a concrete and an abstract level, respectively. The earlier phase, morality of constraint, is characterized by unilateral respect, which is, by nature, non-reciprocal. A child whose moral judgement stems from this stage does not appeal to any form of reciprocity, whatsoever. In the morality of cooperation, however, one begins to see the development, first of concrete reciprocity, or restricted exchange, and only later of abstract reciprocity or generalized exchange.

The problem of concern, here, quite simply, is whether Piaget's moral structure, reciprocity, is reflected in the stage theory of Kohlberg? In 1971 Kohlberg addressed himself to the critical nature of reciprocity or reversibility in moral judgements, and attempted, at least in theory, to describe the developing principle of reciprocity across his six stages. The attempt and the results are admirable. Nonetheless, one searches high and low in Kohlberg's scoring manual (1982) for evidence of this developing

reciprocity in the criterion judgements of responses of individuals of each stage. The concept is not totally absent, but neither is it articulated, nor logically extended throughout the system. Interestingly, perhaps because Kohlberg had been so faithful to a Piagetian approach in his clinical method of assessment, it appears feasible to fill in some of the gaps in his method of assessment of moral orientations. Both currently scoreable and non-scoreable material in the protocols are analyzable for the structure of reciprocity. Let us turn to that endeavor now.

A moral dilemma may be seen to represent a series of conflicting claims by the "parties" involved. It is my contention that the appeal to claims of the various parties concerned in a dilemma, the particular injustices recognized, and the proposed resolutions, reveal the presence or absence of the structure of reciprocity. For example, in the Heinz dilemma the problem may be seen from stage 1 through 6 as a series of conflicts between increasingly more general and universal parties of concern. Similarly, the number and types of injustices recognized vary across stages. And, finally, the nature of the resolutions of the injustices varies across moral orientations. In this way, the resolution of moral dilemmas may be viewed as injustices and compensations. Such compensations tend toward abstract and perfect reciprocity.

At stage two, the dilemma is one of competing needs or desires of individuals. One attempt at compensation includes the weighing of relative injustices. Stealing may be deemed justifiable because "The druggist is losing $200, or his (Heinz) wife living." This material "exchange", each potentially gives up something, is judged as unjust because the druggist's $200 is weighed as objectively less valuable than Heinz' wife living.

Stealing is, therefore, considered an act of compensation for the injustice based on the relative difference of losses. It, however, is not a perfect compensation; the druggist still loses.

At stage three, prosocial rather than individual concerns dominate and a more generalized notion of exchange emerges. Within prosocial values the druggist's effort is seen to merit a return, but in this case, the return is deemed unjust because it is part of an "if I win, you lose" system. The judgement to steal may be asserted, therefore, because "The druggist should get reward, but not at someone else's expense." This appears to be stage three vs. stage four because there is no statement of institutionalized rights and duties. Apparently, it is assumed that the druggist will get his reward elsewhere, but such a perfect reciprocal compensation is not clear.

At stage four, the injustice is often laid squarely in the hands of society. "The druggist shouldn't be allowed to charge horrible prices for a drug that saves a life; because he did, Heinz has a right to take it from him." Heinz' stealing compensates for the injustice of society in failing in its duty to protect the lives of its members. The druggist's act is seen as an injustice to society and he has no claim.

Perhaps the clearest example of reciprocity or compensation for injustice is shown in the following abstract appeal. "Because the drug increased the wife's chance to survive, it takes precedence over the effect of stealing. It sort of cancels out the immorality of his stealing in that situation." This resolution suggests the perfect negation of a negation, a complete compensation of different claims. The parties concerned appear

to be the interaction of the collection of humanity itself; the injustice is the reversal of the proper order of a hierarchy of humane values.

While this is a brief sketch of how Kohlberg's system of stages may be viewed as a developing compensation for injustices regarding retributive justice, in answer to the question "Is Kohlberg really Piagetian?" the answer is, "It is quite possible!"

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